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4. FEEDING PATTERN OF AN EGRET

Driving through a drizzle on 2nd June morning to Kihim, Alibag (Maharashtra), along National Highway 17, I saw a freshwater stream with abruptly straight, precipitous sides. On the banks of the stream was gathered a flock of Egrets of various species. As I kept wondering what could be the purpose of this assemblage, I saw an egret hurriedly step forward to the edge of the stream, and throw itself down on the water. Floating on the surface for a split second it picked up a beakful, and laboriously got air-borne, and flew back to the bank. There it went through the act of swallowing its catch, and fluffed off the water soaked in its feathers. From its completely black beak, and yellow mottled feet, I made out the bird to be a Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*.

One invariably sees egrets working down sloping stream banks, and hunting in shallow waters. Often they feed in irrigated paddy fields in the dry season. However, I am not aware of Egrets hurtling themselves onto water from a height either from my personal birding experience, or from any reports published in bird literature. The action of the egret was reminiscent of "bellyflopping" by the Pond Heron described by G.B.F. Muir, in the Society's *Journal* 24: 366-7, and referred to in the HANDBOOK by Drs Salim Ali & S. Dillon Ripley, Vol. 1: 63. Major I. R. Grimwood & M.J.C. Brocklehurst in Society's *Journal* 81(3): 696-7 record the Pond Heron stooping onto water from the air in a clumsy, tern-like manner.

BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY,
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5. THE VEDANTHANGAL WATER-BIRD SANCTUARY: A NEW BREEDING GROUND FOR PELICANS AND PAINTED STORKS

There are no published reports so far regarding breeding of Grey Pelicans (*Pelecanus philippensis*) and Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) at Vedanthangal Water-Bird Sanctuary (Chengleput District, Madras). Krishnan (1960) and Spillett (1966) regarded them as visiting birds and not as breeding

birds. Nagulu and Ramana Rao (1983) considered that the Pelican was an occasional visitor but not a breeding bird to the Vedanthangal Water-Bird Sanctuary, after their visit in 1981. But pelicans were found breeding at the sanctuary during 1983-84 season (Paulraj 1984). They built nests in tall Barringtonia

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trees inside the sanctuary tank. But, during the same season no Painted Storks were observed there. During the 1984-85 season, as there was not sufficient water in the Vedanthangal sanctuary tank, the Grey Pelicans only visited and went away without breeding. During the 1985-86 season, they started arriving here from 10.12.85 onwards. Nest building activities were noted from 28.1.86 onwards. At that time there were about 50 Pelicans staying inside the sanctuary tank. Hatchlings were first observed on 24.3.86. A total of twelve nests were found in four large Barringtonia trees. Total count made on 18.4.86 revealed that a maximum population of 102 adult Pelicans stayed during this season as against 65 Pelicans observed during the 1983-84 season (Paulraj 1984).

During the 1985-86 season, the Painted Storks started arriving at Vedanthangal sanctuary from 6.1.86 onwards. Maximum population (127 adults) was reached on 3.3.86. They started building nests from 22.2.86 on-

wards, when their population was about 55. Hatchlings were first observed on 8.4.86. A total of 22 nests of Painted Storks was noticed both on the Barringtonia and Babul trees.

The Grey Pelicans selected only big Barringtonia trees for nest building and roosting, although sufficiently large *Acacia nilotica* (Babul) trees were also available there. Previous literature and observations reveal that the pelicans were regular visiting birds of the Vedanthangal bird sanctuary, but they started breeding here only recently, from 1984 onwards, whereas the Painted Storks may not be a regular visiting bird, as they were not seen during the 1984 season. Their breeding during the 1985-86 season at Vedanthangal is the first record for this place. Further, it may be expected that the Grey Pelican may breed here regularly during every season if the Vedanthangal sanctuary tank gets filled up and holds water for a duration of at least four months.

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